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ATHENIA OF DAMASCUS.



ATHENIA OF DAMASCUS.

A Tragedy.

BY RUFUS DAWES.

34.



NEW-YORK:
PUBLISHED BY SAMUEL COLMAN.
PR 1839.

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PUBLISHER'S ADVERTISEMENT.

ATHENIA OF DAMASCUS is the first of a series, which will be continued, if sufficient encouragement is afforded. In selecting for the Dramatic Library, none but the finest productions will be approved; and those best suited to impart instruction while they afford amusement, will be preferred.

The second number will contain *BIANCA VISCONTI*, by N. P. Willis.

It is believed that much native genius, now in obscurity, would be introduced to the public, if this enterprise is successful.

NEW-YORK, January, 1839.

DRAMATIC PERSONS.

EUPHRON,	<i>Prefect of Damascus.</i>
CALOUS,	<i>Syrian leader.</i>
LUCRETIVS,	<i>A distinguished citizen.</i>
DECIUS,	<i>A Senator.</i>
KALED,	<i>Saracen chief.</i>
ABDALLAH,	<i>His Lieutenant.</i>
DERA,	<i>A Saracen officer.</i>
ATHENIA,	<i>Daughter of Euphron.</i>
ADA,	<i>Her attendant.</i>
OPHIRA,	<i>A Syrian woman.</i>

*Senators, Syrian and Arabian soldiers, Messenger, Grecian
captive, People of Damascus.*

The scene lies in the Ager Damascenus, and in the City of
Damascus, at the close of the siege A. D. 634.

ATHENIA OF DAMASCUS.

A Tragedy.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

A street in Damascus. — Time, sunrise.

Enter Lucretius and Decius.

DECIUS.

And is there then no hope, Lucretius ?

LUCRETIVS.

Yes, such as looks from out the headsman's eye,
When the axe gleams before a malefactor.

DECIUS.

What's to be done ?

LUCRETIVS.

Murder and sacrilege !

*

DECIUS.

And then to starve !

LUCRETIVS.

What can the Emperor mean ?

Surely, the fate of Bozra might have waked
The boa from his slumber, — but he lies
Gorged with his Persian victories, as if
Sleep were the best security.

DECIUS.

Heaven's wrath

Unvials on the earth — the plagues are out
For Syria's overthrow.

LUCRETIVS.

It is but just;

We have offended Heaven !

DECIUS.

But know you not,

Heraclius is entreated for our aid ?

LUCRETIVS.

What signifies his aid at such a pass,
When like the scorpion, we are girdled in,
And scorched to suicide ? To hear these wolves
Howl for their Paradise ! as if the wretch
That fixed the seal of hell upon their foreheads,
Would cheat that hell of its own sensual slaves !

*

DECIUS.

It is a weary siege! — Damascus reels
Even to her downfall. Should Heraclius fail
To send us speedy succour, we are lost.

LUCRETIVS.

What say the Senate? Have you yet proclaimed
Last night's determination?

DECIUS.

When retired,
We were again convoked to meet at sunrise;
Calöis is summoned to the council room,
For some important matter.

LUCRETIVS.

Heaven forefend
Greater calamity! — the times are bad
When soldiers prompt the Senate.

DECIUS.

Were you going
On to the Senate-House, Lucretius?

LUCRETIVS.

Yes.

DECIUS.

Let us then go together, — 'tis so dull
In such a time to be companionless!

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II.

*The senate-house; Euphron, Decius, and other Senators seated.
Caloüs standing in the back ground.*

EUPHRON.

Fathers, I have convoked you at this hour,
To reconsider last night's resolution.
There have been spies on your deliberations.
The morning watch challenged a cowed foe,
Who shouted '*Allah Akbar !*' and escaped
On wings of lightning. We have tracked his path
Even from this chamber, where he must have lain
Treachingly hidden : Howe'er that be,
Our weakness is betrayed. It now remains
To scan our desperate purpose. Senators,
Let us receive your views in this emergence :
Only remember, moments now are hours.

DECIUS.

I see no reason, in this foul mischance,
Which scourges so our negligence, that we
Should change the resolution we have made.
It is impossible for us to hold
The city two days more : — we starve already,
Though the extent of her necessity,
Damascus does not know ; — she little dreams

How certain is her ruin. I advise,
Even as I did last night, to sue for peace,
And leave the rest to Heaven.

EUPHRON.

Let him who controverts what Decius says,
Speak to the Senate.

(*A pause.*)

Have you all one mind? —

Know then — I summoned Caloüs among you,
In apprehension of this same restraint :
For in a matter of such deep concern,
A soldier's sphere may stir the stagnant blood,
And give it healthy action. Caloüs, speak,
The Senate asks your free, untrammelled mind !

(*Caloüs comes forward.*)

CALOUS.

For this unusual honour — had I power
Commensurate with gratitude, I'd bear,
Most willingly, the weight of all your woes.
But, conscript fathers ! all I have is yours,
A life devoted to the public weal.
In early days, midst Rome's exalted pride,
'Twas deemed no mean occasion to decree
The highest honour that a soldier loves,
That he did not despair of the Republic.
For me — I hold no commerce with despair.

Damascus may be, shall be free again.
Could I have had a voice with yours, last night,
I had protested strongly 'gainst your vote.
Do ye not know, that they who sue for peace
To such a foe as ours, can hope no more?
Had they one christian feeling like our own,
Some bond of human brotherhood that extends
Self-love unto a neighbour, then indeed,
The dove might bear the olive-bough to them;
Not now; — no, fathers! we must fight or die!
And better to do both, to fight *and* die,
Than sue to them for peace.

No, conscript fathers!

They have forestalled your purpose; — it is well.
Your chances of success are multiplied;
Even now, while they expect your suppliant suit,
Astonish their base hopes, — and when the bell
Strikes as a signal, let the ready gates
Pour out a flood of war upon their camp,
And crush them with its weight. Meanwhile, perhaps,
The imperial forces may fresh succour bring,
And seal our great endeavour to be free.
Fathers! I am for liberty or death.

EUPHRON.

We thank thee, Caloüs; — Senators, you hear:
Shall we adopt our counsellor's advice;
Say; shall the vote be, — “liberty or death?”

SEVERAL VOICES.

Death or liberty ! — Liberty forever !

EUPHRON.

'Tis done : — and when the dial feels the sun
Steal o'er the hour of noon, — let the great bell
Strike from the Martyr's Tower for liberty !
When next we meet, may peace be with Damascus.

(The Senators rise and disperse — Euphron follows Calous.)

EUPHRON.

Soldier ! one moment, ere you quit this room.

CALOUS.

I wait your pleasure — but be brief, I pray you.
We have no leisure now for idleness.

EUPHRON.

Athenia ! —

CALOUS.

Is't then of *her* you'd speak ?

EUPHRON.

It may seem strange, in times of such calamity,
To mingle private thoughts with public business ; —
But there are secret springs within the breast,
Which when disordered, clog the whole machine.
You love Athenia !

CALOUS.

If ever man loved woman.

EUPHRON.

Caloüs, you have a treasure in that heart,
Of golden fruit, that Cræsus had not bought,
Though he had hewn his Lydian mountains down,
And turned Pactolus from his shining sands,
To bribe the Hesperian dragon. Yet you deem
Your love equivalent to such a gain !

CALOUS.

If ever such unworthy thought were mine,
How could I know the happiness of loving ?
A heart that feels the immortal glow of love,
Knows no such selfishness.

EUPHRON.

Your mutual hopes
Have long been known to me ; but if you think
To wed my daughter, you must give me proof,
Like Curtius, who would leap within the gulf
His country wished to close :—and could'st thou stand
O'er such a verge as that which Marcus saw
Before assembled Rome, and plunge within,
Reckless of all things but the public good ?—

CALOUS.

Ay ; though it were to grapple with the Sphinx,

Or headlong dive where Typhon breathes the fires,
Locked in his rock-ribbed sepulchre ; — so long
As Honour points the way, and Love's fair hand
Beckons me onward — name the desperate deed,
And for the heavenly guerdon promised me,
The Fates shall bow before ennobling *will*,
And resolution o'erleap destiny !

EUPHRON.

And could you bear the hisses of the people,
The execrations of distempered men,
For making some unheard-of sacrifice ?
Say, could you immolate a noble name,
But for a day — forego your reputation —
Assume the villain — wear a traitor's mask —
Bring down a hundred thousand human curses,
Within an hour, on your devoted head,
And all to wed Athenia ?

CALOUS.

Senator !

Well might I say I'd grapple with the Sphinx,
For never did Cimmerian riddle wear
So dark an aspect — prithee, sir, explain !

EUPHRON.

What if the popular breath should damn the sun,
In his meridian glory — do'st thou think,
His beams would fall less brightly ?

CALOUS.

And what then?

EUPHRON.

Reputation is but idle wind
Blown against *character*, which when unstained,
With an immortal vigour may upbear
Against the slanderous world its angel face,
And fix its gaze on Heaven!

CALOUS.

Let me drink
The Clarian waters that invest thy soul,
Though I imbibe my death! unlock the spring—
And if the revelation blanch my cheek,
The Sibyl whisper must propound some deed,
Too horrible for human utterance.

(*Euphron whispers him.*)

CALOUS.

What do you mean, my lord?

EUPHRON.

Patience!

(*Whispers again.*)

Now dar'st thou do this thing?—

CALOUS.

I am a very coward in all deeds

Where honour dares not mingle. — No ! I dare not !

EUPHRON.

Yet the archangel when he folds his wings,
Veils, not destroys, his glory ; *think* of this.

CALOUS.

My lord, I cannot think of degradation,
And link the foul imagination, too,
With the immaculate image of my love —
Nature revolts at such dire contraries.
Methinks you task my virtue in strange wise ;
Or standing in such delicate relation
To my respect and sufferance — you presume
More than becomes you, to inflict on one
Disarmed by his affections, and your own !

EUPHRON.

Were my intent dishonourable, Caloüs !
Thy serpent-twisted armour would strike dead
The base assailant of thy character —
But I would build up honour for thy name,
And make thee heir to higher, richer treasure,
Than the sun-worshipper of Persia lost,
If thou wouldst only reach thy hand to take it !

CALOUS.

I have the senate's mandate on my mind —
The legions wait my presence.

(*Shouts of "Liberty forever!" without.*)

The senate's last decree has found a tongue
In every heart — and "*Liberty forever!*"
Rings through the iron phalanx, and inflames
With heavenly ardour; — welcome, oh, thrice welcome
Death-daring Hope! — Shout, shout again, brave soldiers;
Your eagles strain their golden wings once more
For victory — and the red vultures cleanse
Their clotted beaks to banquet on the foe!

EUPHRON.

Onward to battle then, for liberty!

CALOUS.

For liberty!

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE III.

An apartment in Euphron's house. Athenia and Ada.

ATHENIA.

Poor sufferers! would that my means were greater!

ADA.

They were so grateful, lady, that their tears
Mixed with their supplications for thy blessing.
I could not help weeping to see them weep.

ATHENIA.

Oh, my poor bleeding country ! for thy sins,
How terrible this judgement of high Heaven ! —
They were all fed, and well provided, Ada !

ADA.

Yes ; but the little infant that you saw,
Died at its mother's breast — and would you think it ?
The mother laughed out loud — weeping and laughing —
And then she shuddered so, in anguish, lady,
I ran and brought the pretty flowing mantle
You gave me on my birth-day, which she took,
And, sighing, folded round her lifeless child : —
It was a trifling present — nay, not so —
Yet, pardon me — look, here she comes again !

(Enter Ophira.)

ATHENIA.

Merciful Heaven ! what a sight is this !

OPHIRA.

Hush ! — sh ! you will wake my child — so ! softly ! softly !
We shall have food enough when the moon changes —
They say the grave is not so cold neither ! —

ATHENIA.

What wouldst thou have, thou poor unfortunate !

OPHIRA.

Only a little food while my child dies ! —

For mercy, charity ! — hush ! — sh ! — I am coming —
Wait awhile — wait awhile — *we'll bury this first* —
And then — keep off thy hand, base Saracen !
He is my husband — do not kill him ! — monster !
Right through his heart ! murder ! help ! Christians, help !
[*Rushes out.*

ATHENIA.

Spirit of holiness ! dove of the hallowed ark !
That bears the sinking soul above the tide,
Come with the olive-blooming harbinger
Of meek-eyed Peace, and midst the spirit's strife,
Bend once again thy rainbow o'er the storm ! —
[*Exeunt.*

SCENE IV.

An opening in a range of mountains, (the Libanus.) The river Barrady breaking out from the opening — Damascus in the distance with gardens. A high precipitous rock surmounted by a castle overhanging the river. The scene lies below in the Ager Damascenus. The tent of Kaled discovered. Time, sunrise — the sun gilding the spires of the city. Kaled and Dera outside the tent.

DERA.

Thus far has Allah blest us — praised be Allah !
Scarce had I left the infidel's abode,

Fit paradise for dew-eyed luxury,
When the bright morning spread her Tyrian wings,
And waked the slumbering echoes :— I have passed
A night of danger — thrice along the walls
The lynx-eyed sentinel his challenge sent,
And twice was it eluded — one alone
Suspected my great purpose — but I hurled
Defiance in his teeth, and here I am.

KALED.

Well Dera, with thy business ! —

DERA.

Sleep had fled
The fearful people — o'er their pallid brows
The night-torch spread a hue of ghastliness —
Some bowed themselves in tears, and kissed the cross,
While I stood by and smiled : — 'Twas murmured there,
The trunkless head of one they call divine,
Parted its bloodless lips and whispered "wo !" —
At length I gained the council of their chiefs,
Who wearied out the watches of the night,
And heard their resolution — pinched to death
By famine — rent by civil broils, and foes
Who mask themselves in dark hypocrisy —
They have resolved to sue to thee for peace.

KALED.

Then will they sue the hungry lion's mercy —

For by the shrine of Mecca, ere the sun
Shall gild again these lofty mountain tops,
I'll feast upon the bloodless heart of Syria,
And crown the eldest daughter of the world,
In mockery of herself : — How proudly now,
She lifts her conscious beauty to the skies,
Careless of ruin ! — Thou hast ever been
The spot where Nature dimpled into smiles ;
Fit residence for dark-eyed messengers,
Who bear the mandates of eternal God.
Thou art too fair for Christian dogs to inhabit ;
Thou whom Mohammed loved, and loving, feared,
Amidst thy sweet seductions — while his work
On earth remained — exposed to earth's corruption.
The altars which disgrace thee shall be razed,
With all their countless, false divinities.
And thou shalt forge the thunder-bolts of war
For thine own ruin — and this day shall build
A monument to Abubekir's name,
Which shall not crumble — be we only just,
And faithful to our cause.

DERA.

When Kaled speaks,
The sword of Allah leaps to Victory !

KALED.

Nay, scourge of Christians ! keep thy honied words

To recreate a mistress — we have need
Of action, or our scimitars will rust : —
I charge thee, Dera, for this last assault ;
See every man be ready ; when the sun
Shall call to morning prayer — the Prophet's hour
Of certain victory — one sudden burst
Shall overwhelm the city ; — though I would,
If possible, preserve so fair a place,
That Abubekir might repose his age
Among its pleasant gardens ; — but 'tis written !

DERA.

My bosom burns to pay the Christian dogs
The debt I owe their coward treachery.

KALED.

Hope is a willing slave — despair is free —
So shall Damascus gird her iron on,
In desperate resistance — but her doom
Is registered in those black leaves of fate,
Which Allah reads in Heaven — while men tremble.

Enter Abdallah.

Worthy Abdallah ! may the Prophet's blessing,
And Abubekir's honours rest upon thee !
What think'st thou, soldier, shall we carry home
A glittering tribute and a few poor rags,
To grace our triumph in the Caliph's eyes —
Shall we, who sacked the Bassora, and upraised

The Sanjeak-sheriff on the Christian walls
Of many a leagured town, now leave Damascus ?
No ! by Medina, I will storm her citadel —
Exterminate her people, and wring out
The last red drop that gives a Christian life : —
The treacherous infidel ! was't not enough
To parley with foul thoughts, when victory hung
Triumphantly upon the Moslem side,
And tempt my life by stratagem ! — Enough —
Speak, my lieutenant, I would take thy counsel ;
(*Aside.*) So it accord with my fixed resolution.

ABDALLAH.

Sword of God ! —
The tongue of wisdom lies behind her heart ; —
This world is but the shadow of a cloud —
A dream of troubled sleep : were I to seek
So much thy friendship, as the way of right,
I would not think so loudly as I do ; —
But when I cease to do the high behest
Of Allah — when my heavenly leader shows
The way of duty, and I cease to follow,
Then may the angel of relentless death
Bear me to judgement. — Kaled, I protest
Against thy dark design ; — our swords were sent
In the high cause of Allah, to persuade,
Or *force*, if necessary, every one
Who bows to Christ, to leave his impious faith,

And follow all the Koran's sacred laws ; —
Why should we scatter death so needlessly ? —

KALED.

You talk like one that has not been abused ;
Half Christian, by my faith ! and would you turn
Like one contemned, to beg for more contempt ?
This is to be a Christian ; — fie, Abdallah !
I thought you cherished more of manliness !

ABDALLAH.

When Abubekir gave the sword to you,
And took from me the standard, which you bear,
'Though I acknowledged your superior power,
And followed you as leader, do not think
I acted so from love of degradation !
Had I been so ambitious — like the orb
Which wears our silver crescent in the sky,
I could have thrown a shadow o'er your glory ; —
I thought you worthy, but I find you *not* ; —
Nor brave, as once I held you ; though you frown,
And chafe, and rage — I still will stand unmoved,
And tax you with this weakness. Do not think
To scare me with your wrath — what though you smote
Moseilam with the spear that Hamza slew,
And sealed Mohammed's favour ? — It was I
Who stood the Prophet's witness here below, —
'Twas I unfurled the sacred banner first,

And fought its holy battles — ever ready,
As now, to die, ere it shall be polluted !

KALED.

It is not meet that one the Prophet loved,
Should rouse my anger — else, would I —

DERA.

Forbear !

Why should you wage, heroes of Ismaël !
A war of words in conflict with each other ?
Abdallah was Mohammed's earthly witness,
His friend, companion, and the light which chose
His faithfulness, instructed him to act
According to his will :— I hate the Christians —
But then the love I bear his memory,
Is stronger than my hatred of his foes.

KALED.

I am the last to love dissension, Dera !

ABDALLAH.

Then listen ! if we urge extremities,
We blind ourselves to every fair advantage —
Damascus must be ours ;— but if we hold
A deaf ear to her cries, and slaughter wildly,
What city henceforth will submit, while lives
A single arm to keep a city free ? —
Humanity is policy in war —

And cruelty's a prodigal that heaps
A suicidal burthen on himself.

[*The bell of Damascus strikes.*

Enter a Saracen soldier.

SOLDIER.

The Christians are upon the move, my lord;
The sentinel from yonder precipice,
Bade me declare a sally.

KALED.

How is this?

[*To Dera.*

They've fooled thee, soldier,—hurry to the rescue!

[*Exit Dera.*

Abdallah! head the Armenian archers,—bear
The standard in thine own particular hand;
I trust it to thy charge;—forget the past!
Onward and fight for Paradise!

ABDALLAH.

For Paradise!

[*Exeunt.*

END OF ACT I.

ACT II.

SCENE I.

A pleasure-ground in Damascus. Athenia alone.

ATHENIA.

I will not pluck thee from thy parent tree,
Sweet rose of beauty! while the raindrops hang
O'er thy clear blush their modest ornaments —
Another hour shall glory in thy smile,
And when the daylight dies, the queen of Heaven
Shall fold thee in a silver veil of love,
Forgetting her Endymion. Foolish heart!
As if I *loved*! — Yet truly, as I live,
I fear I love the very *thought* of love!
Oh, childish joy! indefinite delight! —
'That I should dream so sweetly — and at morn
Find my eyes wet with tears! —

Enter Caloüs.

CALOUS, (*embracing her.*)

Athenia!

ATHENIA.

Thank thee, Heaven!

CALOUS.

What kind, indulgent power
Has smiled on Caloüs, that so much bliss
At once should dissipate his darkest gloom,
And make a noon of midnight !

ATHENIA.

Thank thee, Heaven !

CALOUS.

Say then, thou lovest me still, Athenia !

ATHENIA.

Love thee ! indeed I know not if I love. —
When thou art nigh, I fain would be alone —
And when away, I'm sad and desolate : —
Beshrew this maiden fickleness of thought !
I would not give the treasure of my love,
For all the wealth that earth or ocean covers : —
And thou wilt save our altars, Caloüs !
The holy cross, and every dear remain
Of sainted martyr, still inviolate !
So shall we wander in our hours of joy,
On the green margin of life's sunny stream,
With more delight than ever — shall we not ?

CALOUS.

What grief can throw a shadow o'er our way,
When love is cloudless ? — let thy heart be still,

Young Halcyon, on its marble resting-place!
There is no fear, Athenia, that the foe
Can harm Damascus; — though his arm is strong,
The arm above is stronger — even now,
The victory is ours.

ATHENIA.

Alas! Damascus.

CALOUS.

Chase these vain fears! — and dost thou, maiden, think
The soil where Adam trod in majesty —
The land Jehovah guarded, when the fiend
Drove Saul to persecute — and where the light
And breath of God softened his heart of steel,
Turning his thoughts to pity and to love;
Think'st thou this consecrated place can yield,
While He is with us, as He e'er has been? —

ATHENIA.

His ways are dark, and deeply intricate —
When Heaven was kindest, innocence was lost,
And Paradise gave birth to Misery.

CALOUS.

Let not such thoughts plant lilies on thy cheek,
My own Athenia! all will yet be well —
Come, let me bind a chaplet of fresh flowers
To deck thy temples — I will steal an hour

From anxious care to sacrifice to Love,
The hopes and wishes I have nursed for thee.—
Not always thus shall be our wayward lot,
To wander here and steal from Love's rich store,
These precious moments of sweet ecstasy !
Not always thus, my girl ! — when dove-eyed peace
Spreads her white wings again, the sacred tie
Shall bind our wedded hearts — till then, my love !
Thy smile shall cheer me on in peril's hour,
With its dear influence !

ATHENIA.

Oh, Caloüs,
Thy words have touched a string of Memory's lyre,
And waked the key-note of the saddest dirge
That Fancy ever played to Melancholy ! —
I dreamed last night — how could I have forgotten ?
I dreamed we stood before St. Michael's altar,
Breathing eternal vows — when — oh ! how strange !
Suddenly, without cause, you tore away
The holy cross down from above the altar,
And trampled it beneath your sandaled feet : —
Oh, such a dream ! — and then methought that I,
With Delphic fury maddened in my dream,
And prophesying ruin, snatched from air,
Hot thunder-fire, and hurled thee to the dust,
Shrieking from very agony of hatred !
Oh, horror, horror, horror !

CALOUS.

Stay these fantastic thoughts, strange excellence !
I love thee more, Athenia, for that mind,
So capable of wild imaginings ! —

ATHENIA.

But why

Can truant Reason thus desert her throne,
And suffer Truth and Falsehood, hand in hand,
To conjure such conceptions in the brain ?

CALOUS.

The mind is ever wakeful — when the spirits
Grow weary, nature calls for their repose ;
And thus our animal being slumbers nightly ;
Yet the mind moves in its eternal course,
Thought following thought, by that association,
Which governed them by day — but like a king
Throned with his vassals slumbering at his side,
Its counsellors are gone — Perception's messengers
Lie mute before their monarch — whose mistake
Leads on to such a labyrinth of errors,
That bright Aurora, with her threads of light,
Must be its Ariadne, or 'tis lost.

ATHENIA.

Oh, strange, mysterious Nature ! strange Philosophy !
That reads its true relations ; — Caloüs !

It is because of their reflex conditions,
Matter and mind thus imaging each other,
That I am led away by fantasy.
Pray Heaven, you fall not in this cruel strife !

CALOUS.

I prithee do not play Cassandra's part,
And prophesy of dying ; — I have here
A fairer Paradise than Moslems have,
With *such* an Houri ! — Come, away with this ; —
How can this dull cloud pass before the sun,
And turn our spring to winter ? — There, I knew
The dimpling bud of my Damascus rose
Was only folding its sweet leaves awhile,
To garner up more beauty !

ATHENIA.

Flatterer !

How well you coin Love's silver currency —
Beshrew me that I so should like its chime ! —
My bosom is a hive — whose winged thoughts
Steal honey from the Hybla of your tongue,
That when its absence brings their wintry hour,
They may retire to their sweet home awhile,
And dream again of summer ! Now, I know
That angels hover round us when we love —
For I have heard strange music in my walks,
Linking the loved ideal of my heart

With all things beautiful — till eye and ear
Drunk in delicious pleasure — How is this ?

CALOUS.

If angels ever leave their pure abodes,
They could not live more spotless than with thee !

ATHENIA.

Hush ! they will hear thee, and offended Heaven
Blast us for sacrilegious vanity.
Caloüs ! I fear I love thee more than Heaven !

CALOUS.

Love such as thine may strike its roots below,
But 'tis a plant that blossoms in the skies.
Look ! how the dew of Heaven upon this flower
Drinks up the sunbeams ! do'st thou think that they
Were sent so many million miles to shine,
Except to bless the petals which they warm ?
Oh, would I were a pencil of that light,
To live an hour with my Damascus rose !

ATHENIA.

Oh, would I *were* a rose, and you my sun —
That every tear which lonely night distils,
Might dance with gladness, when you brought the morn !

[*Caloüs embraces her.*]

Oh, how the heavenly alchemy of Love,
Turns every thought to golden blessedness !

ADA, (*without.*)

What, ho ! my lady ! —

ATHENIA.

It is my Baya's voice — the innocent bird,
That bears our dearest messages of love !

Enter Ada.

Well, minion, thou hast found me — art afraid ?
What hast thou there ? An arrow, by my life !
Has Cupid sped a shaft at thee so soon ?

CALOUS.

Where didst thou find that instrument of death ?

ADA.

I hope, my lord, it is no evil sign.
E'en now while standing by the marble spring,
Listening to hear two sweet birds sing together,
That arrow rustling through the fruit-tree leaves,
Pierced one of those poor birds, which fell down moaning,
Even to my very feet. I plucked it out,
And in exceeding sorrow sought my mistress ;
Still do I hear that dear bird's dying music,
And its poor broken-hearted mate lamenting.

[*During Ada's speech, Caloüs takes the arrow from her, and breaks it ; a paper falls out, which he takes up, and reads.*

CALOUS.

"*To Euphron, Prefect of Damascus!*" —

Athenia, I must leave thee! Stay here, Ada!

Where is the Prefect gone, Athenia?

ATHENIA.

What can this mean? Ah me, some new distress!

CALOUS.

In sooth, 'tis nothing, love! — where is your father?

[*abstractedly.*] Yes! it shall be done!

ATHENIA.

What shall be done?

CALOUS.

What Heaven ordains: — Leave me, my love, awhile!

ATHENIA.

Leave thee awhile! alas, alas, Damascus!

I hear the death-bird screaming on the wind,

Wo to Damascus: — Leave thee awhile — Farewell!

[*Going.*

CALOUS.

Stay, sweet enchantress! by the light of love,

And the unshrined divinity that burns

Within that guileless bosom, where I worship,

Dim not those angel eyes with mortal tears;

I did not mean to give thee pain, Athenia!

ATHENIA, (*looking earnestly at him.*)

Caloüs, thy God will leave thee to that worship,
And wed thee to despair ! [*Turning away sorrowfully.*
Alas, Damascus ! [*Exit.*

CALOUS, (*musings.*)

If I give up this city, they will think
Caloüs the worst of traitors — though the end
Must show the deep fidelity I bear her.
Another day would find Damascus fallen :
Why then delay ? — when sudden death impends,
The direst medicine is not amiss.
But, should I fail ! just Heaven, what wo were mine !
If I succeed — thy smiles, my rescued country !
Thy brighter smiles, Athenia, will repay
This conflict between duty, love, and fear.
It shall be done — dry up your tears, Damascus !
And spare your curses while I work your weal.
Let me peruse this strange despatch again : —

[*While he is reading, Euphron enters — seeing him,*
Caloüs starts.

Now by the Baptist's blood, the thing itself,
The very body that the shadow threw ! —

[*To Euphron.*

Know'st thou this signet ?

EUPHRON.

It is Werdan's !

CALOUS.

See what a herald he has sent to you —

EUPHRON, (*reading.*)

“If you cannot hold the city, contrive to gain time in some way. The army will be at your gates to-morrow.”

The very words !

CALOUS.

Had you another like it ?

EUPHRON.

Even to the very folding : in a reed
Shot as an arrow o’er the garden wall,
I found it ere I saw you in the morning,
And this is but its fellow to secure
Communication. May it be the last ! —
Had I your youth —

CALOUS.

Speak not to me of youth —

I have resolved upon the sacrifice ; —
Yet how shall it be done ? — That is the question.

EUPHRON.

Openly, like a traitor — ’tis a part
Requiring the free action of a mind
Bent on the perpetration of a deed,
Against all dangers panoplied.

CALOUS.

Alas !

Who would believe that Caloüs has revolted ?
They could not find a motive for the crime,
To satisfy astonishment. In truth, sir,
My better nature shrinks. —

EUPHRON.

Why should it so ?

CALOUS.

The Christian precept it would seem, were only
A matter of convenience ! I have learned
To deem it universal in its meaning.
And I confess, my conscience does not like
To view this strange transaction. —

EUPHRON.

As you please !

Your country, nay, Athenia, has no claim
Upon your pity. When Damascus falls, —
As fall she must, — should the impending blow
Strike as it threatens — how can you behold
The flames — the sacrilege — the foul pollution,
You might have once prevented ! — Look you there —
They drag my daughter from me — she is dead ! —
No ! 'tis the seal the wanton Arab sets
On Christian innocence !

CALOUS.

Oh, spare me, spare me !

I prithee do not let thy fancy stain
Her spotless ermine by another thought : —
Name but a pretext that will varnish o'er
The absurdity of such a foul revolt —
Make it but actable — and I will do it.
Teach me to make the treachery probable !

EUPHRON.

I have it, but it tasks thy virtue further —
Thou shalt be superseded in command,
And then revenge were natural !

CALOUS.

Excellent !

EUPHRON.

I'll pull the strings that move those dancing jacks,
The hangers-on of Government for office ;
And they will wag their venal tongues at thee,
And lash the rabble public into foam,
E'en while you save them. 'Tis an easy thing
To open the light flood-gates that hedge up
Public opinion, and let scandal work
On reputation. Are you satisfied ?

CALOUS.

Methinks Lucullus asks me to a feast,

To banquet all the senses — I am lost
In mere imagination of such bounty.
Great God! was ever mortal tasked as I am?
Oh, I could wade through blood for honour's sake,
But to seek glory in so rank a path,
Shames me in doing. May we trust Athenia?

EUPHRON.

No, not a living soul. But I must act
The hypocrite and liar for her sake,
And curse thee to my daughter! —

CALOUS.

Horrible,
That love should mask in livery of hell!

EUPHRON.

To-morrow, ere the impatient sun goes down,
Think what a bright reverse! Our city free;
The Imperial Army at our very gates;
The shouts, the triumph of a grateful people;
While their deliverer bears his bride in joy!
But if the foe once gain the city walls,
Though Werdan should invest them with his rank,
The country is alive with maddened Arabs,
And midst their still accumulating power,
How could we hope for mercy?

CALOUS.

Say no more,

It shall be done, be thou but prompt to aid me.

EUPHRON.

Meet me an hour hence in the library.

I have a friar's dress — which oft at night,

Serves me in my excursions through the city.

'Twill help this great occasion. Fare thee well!

[*Exit.*]

CALOUS.

If I should fail! oh God, if I should fail!

What crawling wretch would hug his grim despair

Like Caloüs! hence spectre, to thy grave!

Why do'st thou come to make a coward of me?

[*Exit.*]

SCENE II.

The Saracen camp.— Kaled, Abdallah, Dera.

KALED.

Foiled yet again! the standard taken too!

ABDALLAH.

'Tis safe, my lord!

KALED.

But then it was polluted.

ABDALLAH.

Not by a Christian's touch ! 'tis true, awhile
They bore it by the staff— myself struck down
By their infernal engines ; —not a thread
Of its green folds was yet contaminated.
Dera was present, and can vouch for this.

DERA.

By Mecca, it is true ! 'Twas the best fight
Since Karbur swam with blood at Akrahar !

(Enter a Saracen soldier in haste.)

KALED.

How now ! speak, fellow ! — tell me what's the matter.

SOLDIER.

God is great ! May the word of God be ever victorious !
The garrison at Bozra is in danger. — A caravan from Antioch has been taken, bound for Damascus. We have learned from one who has renounced the idolatry of Christ, that Heraclius, the Emperor, has sent an army to relieve Damascus. May the arm of Allah strengthen you !

KALED.

Presumptuous fool !

Would Kaled had an hundred thousand arms
To clear the world of those unwashed idolaters !
What shall we do, brave soldiers ? Is it best
To raise this siege awhile — or wilt thou go

[To Dera.]

With half the Caliph's forces, and thyself
Dash at these wood-adorers — scourge of Christians ?
Ere thou return, Damascus will have poured
Her treasures to pile up the monument
Which thou shalt lay with the imperial gold.

DERA.

Let me away at once, before the foe
Can hurry on their legions to these gates.
If we march on to-night, the palm's long shade
Will point the east to conquered Syria.

KALED.

Begone in Allah's name ; for Paradise !
On the event of this great action, Dera !
Much will depend. Be cautious, curb thy valour ;
Strike once, and mightily. Remember, Paradise !
Thou who hast saved the standard, art deserving
To fight beneath its shadow ; bear it with thee !
Begone and conquer !

DERA.

I have already won
The favour of the black-eyed girls of Heaven !

KALED.

They look with eager longing for thee, Dera ;
There's rest for thee in Heaven. On, action, action !

(Enter two Saracens, leading in a Grecian captive.)

What have we here ? stay, Dera, here's more news.

What art thou, dog ?

CAPTIVE.

A prisoner, at thy mercy !

KALED.

A Christian and a dog. Whence art thou ? tell me,

Or I will throw thy carcass to the hounds

That howl for thy whole kindred !

CAPTIVE.

Spare my life,

And I will serve thee faithfully and well.

God is the only God, and Mohammed

His Prophet.

KALED.

Thou hast won thy life already ;

Speak freely to me. How canst thou serve Allah ?

Thou shalt be harnessed in pure gold — speak freely.

CAPTIVE.

The Grecian army —

KALED.

What of it ? where ! how many ? haste, I pray thee !

CAPTIVE.

Ten leagues away, and hurrying by forced marches.

It will be here to-morrow.

KALED.

Know'st its route ?

CAPTIVE.

Yes, and will guide thee to it unerringly.

KALED.

Enough ! we'll go together, scourge of Christians !

Abdallah, thou shalt govern in my absence !

Keep the defensive ! and retreat, if haply

These rabid dogs unkennel from the city.

Go, Dera, rouse the lions from their lair,

Bring out ten thousand archers, and as many

High mettled chargers, manned and scimitared ;

Provision for one day — Heraclius

Has doubtlessly provided with large bounty

For all our possible wants. — Go, and when ready,

Bring up my guard, and we will on to Bozra.

[*Exit Dera.*

Bear off your prisoner — give him nourishment,

And have him ready for the march forthwith.

[*Exeunt soldiers with captive.*

Abdallah, I must charge thee in my absence,

To have a keen observance of Damascus.

These infidels are wily as the brood

That weep upon the borders of the Nile.

Be sparing of thy pity, should they send

Their olive-bearing messengers to thee.

Our policy is conquest, and our aim
To propagate Mohammed's revelation.
Be all things to all men but seemingly,
And keep thy own heart as a citadel,
Where to retire in every great emergence.
But trusting to thy faith and high discretion,
Thou hast full power when Kaled is away.

ABDALLAH.

Alas, my shoulders are unfit to bear
Unwonted burthens — and my heart misgives,
Lest Kaled may return dissatisfied.

KALED.

Fear not. Thy course is plain. Follow it out,
And discontent can find no place to enter.
Hazard no battle — and what else betides,
So we possess Damascus, all is well.!

ABDALLAH.

If Abubekir be my judge, perhaps
My motives to advance the cause of Allah
May make amends for all imprudences.

KALED.

See ! Dera is already on the march.
There is a soldier who can carve out empire.
Yet should he hold a sceptre, his weak head
Would swim so, he would dash his giddy brains out.

And yet how well he bears himself in war !

[Martial music ; enter Dera with a guard of Saracens, who march and counter-march ; Dera, in the meantime, gives up the command to Kaled, and exeunt.]

END OF ACT II.

ACT III.

SCENE I.

Enter Lucretius and Decius.

LUCRETIUS.

What, further shortened in our poor allowance ?

DECIUS.

The granaries are exhausted.

LUCRETIUS.

Gracious Heaven !

Where will this end ? Yet no relief — Oh, patience !

To what extent must we endure these ills ?

Oh, madness ! that the Prefect should divest

Syria's right arm of power at such a time,

When all its strength is needed ! Why was this ?

DECIUS.

He urges the advice he gave the Senate,

Though prompted by himself, and he declares

That Caloüs has o'erstepped authority,

Using a dangerous influence with the people.

'Tis strange how many unimagined charges

Can swarm upon a man, when once the lid
Of the Pandora box of contumely
Is opened o'er his head !

LUCRETIUS.

'Tis strange indeed !

DECIUS.

There never was a soldier more deserving,
Than he who is rejected. He has borne
Office with modesty, performing ever,
His duty with a promptitude and zeal,
That many a time have gained his country laurels.

LUCRETIUS.

Nor is he a mere soldier.

DECIUS.

Far from it.

He served his country in a magistracy,
And what is wonderful in these bad times,
He never served himself. Why, look around,
And count, if possible, the pampered numbers
Who fatten on the state. They are the men,
Who, if they find a man too honourable
To be a fellow-gleaner of the spoils,
When faction's sickle sweeps the public wealth,
Lift up their angry voices to the crowd,
And breathe around their pestilential breath,

Till virtue's self is tainted by its touch : —
So has it been with him ; — the people cry,
“Down with the Greek ! Give us a Syrian leader.” —
And for the good which he has done to them,
They pelt him with hard curses — hiss at him —
And call him General of their misfortunes.
But yesterday, he was their lord and idol ;
Why, sir, the very soldiers curl their lips,
And whisper in sarcastic raillery,
Sporting in his disgrace.

LUCRETIVS.

The sun is set,
Which broke from the high places on his head,
And he who scattered its reflected beams,
Condenses on his cold and rayless brow,
The reeking atmosphere of insolence.
The Prefect is a traitor to our hopes !
Some say he's jealous of Athenia's favour,
As ill bestowed ; thus for a private pique,
He shapes the destiny of countless thousands.

DECIUS.

Athenia is a noble gentlewoman,
Stamp'd in the finest mould of excellence.
Rome in her palmyest state, when woman nursed
Her grandeur, by the care of her young heroes,
Had scarce her equal. How will she endure

This outrage on affection, she whose mind
High over-tops all selfishness ?

LUCRETIOUS.

Yet know,

Her love is but the blossom of a tree
Of most luxuriant verdure : in her heart,
The love she bears her country is supreme
O'er all affections ; and her Christian zeal
So shames the false and meretricious colour
That mantles our deep-grained hypocrisy,
That I have sometimes gazed on her with awe,
As an angelic substance. Many a time,
When her wrapped spirit winged itself away
In holy meditation, I have seen
Unearthly beauty kindle o'er her face,
And almost heard the harmony I knew
Her kindred thoughts were hymning with her God.

[*Shouts without.*

Why this tumult ?

DECIUS.

Probably the appointment
Of Manlius the Centurion.

[*Shouts continue.*

Shout away !

Toss up your caps, enjoy your festival !
Riot in madness ! — in a few brief hours,

You'll wear your chains more gracefully for this : —
Here comes lord Caloüs — I will leave you to him.

[*Exit.*

Enter Caloüs.

LUCRETIVS.

Noble Caloüs,
I greet thee with a soldier's sympathy !

CALOUS.

Thanks for this courtesy !

LUCRETIVS.

Do'st thou not grieve
To see Damascus mad ?

CALOUS.

Say, had she cause
To blow this mildew on my honour's bud ?

LUCRETIVS.

Never ! thou'st always served her like a son,
And she has proved a most unnatural mother.

CALOUS.

Why, she has cast me off, as I had been
Tainted with crime. Lucretius, thou'rt a man
Lifted so high above the influence
Of popular breath that sways these demagogues,
That in my sore distress I come to ask

For counsel in this great calamity.
What shall I do, Lucretius, proudly scorning
To court the pity of the multitude ;
Degraded, stigmatized, and pointed at
By the bought fingers of those brainless shapes
Which call each other men ?

LUCRETIVS.

Ask'st thou me ?

CALOUS.

Aye, good Lucretius, what is to be done ?

LUCRETIVS.

Set thou the first example of true greatness,
And pity an infatuated people.
What is't to thee, that others do thee wrong ?
Thou art *thyself*, amidst the worst injustice,
That hatred can heap upon thy head.
Revenge thy wrongs with magnanimity ;
Build up thy virtue higher than the clouds
That human passion girts the good man with,
And let perpetual sunshine rest upon it.
Forgive thy country, pity her, and save !

CALOUS.

Oh, would I could, Lucretius, — would I could !
But she has come to such a pass, I fear
That patriotism is dead, while selfishness

Stalks like a pestilential spectre forth,
The shadow of her ruin !

LUCRETIVS.

No one knows
The influence of individual effort.
The lowliest man wields every day and hour,
A moral lever which may sway the world.
But one who stands as thou do'st, far apart,
And islanded amidst the foaming crowd,
That chafes upon his shore — his high example
Gives life unto a system, and 'tis his
To be the saviour or the scourge of men !

CALOUS.

True, good Lucretius, it is very true.
Thine is a fine philosophy ; I feel
The holy inspiration that breathes forth
From thy pure precepts ; but humanity ! —
Poor, error-loving, fond humanity —
How do'st thou read the wisdom of the skies,
Yet turn to gaze on earth !
Farewell ! I'll think upon thy good advice,
And sigh o'er its instruction.

[*Exit.*

[*Shouts without.*

LUCRETIVS.

Farewell, thou noble and most injured man !
Here are chromatic discords that might stir

A frame less sensitive. Shout, shout away!

Ignoble slaves! abominable tyrants!

[*Shouts approach.*

Well, ye come this way — I shall not shun ye!

[*Enter a crowd of people with clubs.*

FIRST CITIZEN.

Here is a fellow of the same fine trim,

A rank aristocrat.

SECOND CITIZEN.

Look ye, my hearty!

Where have ye snugged away that clean-faced scoundrel?

LUCRETIVS.

Whom seek ye, sage supporters of the state —

Supreme dictators, worthy mobocrats!

Can poor Lucretius serve ye any way?

FIRST CITIZEN.

Where's the aristocrat? bring him before us!

LUCRETIVS.

Whom is it that ye call aristocrat?

FIRST CITIZEN.

Calöus, the white-washed Greek — our former General.

LUCRETIVS.

A nobler nature ne'er was sacrificed

To an ungrateful people! hark ye, sirs!

This Caloüs, whom ye basely villify,
Echoing the noisy demagogues that rule ye—

MANY VOICES.

We are not ruled—we are the sovereign people.

LUCRETIOUS.

Ye are the lowest of all earthly slaves!
Ye suffer to be collared, bridled, bitted;
Ye let your riders mount ye, so they cry,
“Dear sovereign people! sinews of the state.”
Ye are led as asses are—as willingly—
So your conductors flatter you with crying
“’Tis as *you* will, *your* will is all supreme,
Most *honest* people!”

MANY VOICES.

Down with this Lucretius!

LUCRETIOUS.

If, haply, midst your crowd of servile flatterers,
An independent child of God is found,
To assert the great prerogative of man,
And speak the truth with boldness, instantly,
Ye cry, “aristocrat,” “oppressor,” “tyrant!”
Ye are yourselves your only true oppressors;
Ye are yourselves the true aristocrats;
Ye are the kind of tyrants, who, stark mad,
Blind and bewildered, grope among themselves,

And sacrifice each other. Get ye home,
And purge away the dulness of your eyes,
To see your true condition. Gracious Heaven!
Will the time ever come when man shall learn
There's such a thing as too much liberty?

MANY VOICES.

Down with this rank aristocrat, down with him.

LUCRETIUS.

Ye dare not lay a finger on my head,
Unworthy Syrians! I defy your rage!
Where is your leader? let him show his face —
Ye are a pack of cowards, every one,
Scared even at each other. Do ye come
To seek out Caloüs? — Why look ye, sirs!
Were Caloüs here, he'd frown you to submission.
Here is some money for you; — get some drink,
And pledge us your good wishes — do, I pray ye!

MANY PEOPLE, (*all scrambling for the money.*)

Huzza for Caloüs! long live Lucretius!
Huzza! huzza! huzza!

[*Exeunt tumultuously.*]

LUCRETIUS.

I'd buy a million of ye, had I money,
For any act rebellious. God have mercy!
If our deliverance rests on such as these!

[*Exit.*]

SCENE II.

An apartment in Euphron's house. — Athenia and Ada.

ADA.

Why does my mistress weep? It grieves my heart
To see her shed so many tears — has Ada
Offended her?

ATHENIA.

Hush, Ada, I am done —
The fountain is exhausted. Have you seen
My father in his usual walk, to-day?

ADA.

Early this morning — not since he went abroad.

ATHENIA.

Would he were within! my heart is heavy,
And longs to pour its griefs within some bosom.
There is a noise in his apartment now;
Go, Ada, call him to me, and request,
If he have leisure, a short interview.

[Exit Ada who returns immediately.]

ADA.

'Tis not your father, madam.

ATHENIA.

Not my father!

ADA.

It is a holy friar — an intimate ;
I've seen him often pass the corridor,
But never with your father.

ATHENIA.

Call him hither !

[*Exit Ada.*

My spirits would be lightened of this weight,
That presses them to earth. Why are we thus
The sport of circumstance — that some light breath
Should quench the taper that dispelled the night,
And call it back again ?

Enter Ada.

ADA.

My lady, he is gone — his hurried step
Chid my request, ere I had uttered it.

ATHENIA.

Oh, for a sister's heart, to share with mine,
Its burthen of affection.

ADA.

Dearest lady !

ATHENIA.

My gentle girl, do'st thou not sometimes wish
To be among the playmates of thy home,

And watch the antelopes among the hills,
Bounding from crag to crag ; and hear the storm
Sounding majestic anthems ?

ADA.

Dearest lady !

I often think of home — but 'tis to bless
My parents that they gave my youth to thee.
Oh, they were kind, and taught me how to live ;
But thou, alone, hast taught me how to die !
May I not call thee sister ?

ATHENIA.

Yes, sweet Ada !

Enter Euphron in haste.

Oh, my father !

EUPHRON.

Quickly, Athenia,

Tell me who passed the corridor just now ?

ATHENIA.

Why, father, was it not the holy friar,
Who visits you so often ?

ADA.

It was he.

I saw him pass with an unusual speed,
Some time ago.

EUPHRON.

Hark ! what noise is that ?

Again !

[*Going to the window.*

Look how the people hurry through the streets !

[*Bell strikes.*

Why all this tumult ? treason, by the cross !

ATHENIA.

God forbid ! God forbid !

Enter a Soldier.

EUPHRON.

How now ? what means this tumult ? speak, I charge thee !

SOLDIER.

My tongue refuses utterance — I cannot.

EUPHRON.

Slave, if you think to trifle with me thus,

I'll hurl thy trunkless head among the crowd.

Speak, chicken-hearted varlet !

SOLDIER.

Treason is out — Caloüs has fled to Kaled !

ATHENIA.

Liar ! May Heaven's hot lightning scorch thy heart ! —

Infamous liar ! 'tis false, thou hollow villain —

Caloüs a traitor ! Caloüs fled to Kaled !

Sooner would Michael fly to the arch fiend,
And storm the throne of Heaven !

EUPHRON.

Impossible !

ATHENIA.

Ay, though you stripped him of his oaken crown,
Blasted his full-blown honours — banished him —
He could not play the Roman exile's part,
And strike against his country !

Yet that dream !

How like an ugly fiend at murky night,
It rises up before me ! — Hence, base phantoms !
Ye hell-engendered offspring of bad thoughts,
Back to your sulphurous caverns ! — Air !

[*Faints.*

The attendants support Athenia. — Another soldier enters.

EUPHRON.

More news !

Out with it, screaming raven ! — tell us quickly,
Is it all true ? Has Caloüs fled indeed ?

SOLDIER.

Most basely fled.

EUPHRON.

Then are we lost forever !

ATHENIA, (*reviving.*)

Where is lord Caloüs ?

[*Looking around wildly.*]

EUPHRON.

Alas ! my wretched daughter !

Caloüs has played the traitor to his trust,

And sacrificed his country ! Damned villain !

ATHENIA.

Speak not thus ! speak not thus ! in pity, father ;

I never knew you thus ; your own Athenia,

Your daughter, father, begs you to forbear !

No ! no ! no ! no ! —just Heaven avert the omen !

EUPHRON.

Alas ! my gentle sufferer, 'tis too true !

ATHENIA.

Then thou Eternal Father of all Truth,

Pour out the vials of thy wrath upon him.

May his false heart blaze with the flames of hell,

And crust to ashes. (*kneels.*) Here I vow to thee,

Never again to commune with kind thoughts,

Till thy sure retribution mete to him

The scourge of perfidy ! Hence, charmer, hence !

Come black revenge, revenge that knows no stay,

From that cold grave, where lies my buried love,

And may death's angel hover o'er his path,

And darken it still deeper with despair !

[While she is still kneeling, the scene closes.]

SCENE III.

Near the Saracen camp.

Enter Caloüs, (throwing off a friar's dress.)

CALOUS.

Now then I'll play the villain — thus the soul
Strips off its mortal dress to play the fiend,
And lure confiding fools to certain ruin.
Unhappy city ! I can bear your curses ;
Howl your wrath louder yet ; a few more hours
Shall change this jarring discord to a hymn
Of gratitude and joy. And thou, Athenia !
Thou who hast chained me to the car of love,
Keep back the ignorant current of thy thoughts,
And let its tranquil beauty, as is wont,
Paint the clear depths of Heaven !

This should be
The outposts of their camp. Now steel thy heart,
Caloüs, for perfidy ! — forgive me, Heaven,
If thou can'st sanctify unrighteous means,
To aid the cause of Christian truth and mercy !
Hist ! who is here ? sure 'tis a Syrian woman ; —

Ah, me ! what sorrows may that creature have !
For none but earth-deserted wanderers,
From yon beleagured charnel-house of wo,
Would seek asylum here. Who art thou, woman ?

Enter Ophira, who does not heed Caloüs.

OPHIRA.

Who said the ravens brought Elijah food ? Hush ! 'twas the vulture's scream ! — 'Twas manna saved them. To think that the monster could kill her own child ! — She ought to have nursed the poor innocent. I wish it had been *mine*. Come ! come ! come ! I will not hurt you ! Ophira is only a lone woman ! — Now, we can talk the matter over. He said that *man-slaughter and man's-laughter* were the same thing ! — ha ! ha ! ha ! — well might the screech-owl laugh.

CALOUS.

Unhappy woman !

OPHIRA, (*discovering him.*)

Ha ! I have found you then ! why do you not go home to her, if she is unhappy ? She gave me food, and I left her mad ! They are all mad *now* !

CALOUS.

Merciful Heaven !

OPHIRA.

I told them so ! though they all blasphemed and hissed

at me. I told Athenia that I would find you, too; but I cannot find *him*. Tell me, for the love of God, where they have buried my husband?

CALOUS.

Distraction!

OPHIRA.

Look you here, sir; tell me, is not this a sweet corpse? — Yet Ophira is not mad. I wish she were; for see, how they look at me as they pass along: there! they are whispering about it now! [*Falls down.*]

CALOUS, (*aside.*)

Poor maniac!

OPHIRA.

I heard her tell, how she and her husband were lost in a desert, where they could not get any food. How the Arabs murdered him, while the poor child starved at her parched bosom. It was a sweet ballad, though enough to break a heart of stone. It went thus:

(*Sings.*)

“*The elf-king breathed in its infant ear,
While the earth-worm coiled in its clayey bed.*”

I forget the rest; but it went on to tell, how they laid it under the cypress tree, and covered it with fresh flowers. Let us now go home, and leave them all in the church-yard

They are sound asleep — don't wake them ! hush ! — sh !
let me cover you over, my dear child ! — there !

[*Dies.*

CALOUS.

This is but one of the unnumbered ills,
Conquest has brought Damascus — such is war !
Oh Heavens ! when will the spiritual sun arise,
And with his beams effulgent, drive away
The mists of error that so long have hung
Their dark, unnatural drapery o'er the mind,
That broods o'er human carnage ! when will man
Turn from the path of Cain, and learn to see
A brother without hating ? Hear me, Heaven !
Alas ! how much have *I* to be forgiven !

[*Exit.*

END OF ACT III.

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

Inside of the Saracen tent. — Abdallah surrounded with soldiers.

ABDALLAH.

No news from Kaled yet ?

OFFICER.

Nothing decisive.

But from the Christian captives we have learned
Intelligence that he has met the foe.
Allah is on our side, and we must conquer.

ABDALLAH.

Oh, that Mohammed would come down from Heaven,
And teach us o'er again, those holy lessons
We have so soon forgotten ! Not for war
Nor conquest was the Koran sent to earth ;
But to teach men to live. Would Kaled knew
That mercy is the attribute of Allah !

Enter a Soldier.

SOLDIER.

Strength to the arm of Allah ! Gracious Abdallah,

A Christian prisoner waits to be admitted !

ABDALLAH.

Bring him before us.

[*Exit Soldier.*]

Now would they be-wise,
And barter infidelity for faith,
Damascus still might be their Paradise.

Re-enter soldier with Caloüs in chains.

This is no common man ! his high blood speaks
Even in his silence. As I live, the same !
Art thou not Caloüs, the Syrian leader ?

CALOUS.

I wore the livery once, that slaves for fame !
To-day I am an outcast of the earth ;
But Heaven has set a mark upon my brow
By which Abdallah knows the thing that was.
I am thy willing prisoner !

ABDALLAH.

This is strange !
Why do'st thou say a willing prisoner ?

CALOUS.

I am that wretched thing which men call traitor !

ABDALLAH.

Is 't possible ?

CALOUS.

I am a liar else.

ABDALLAH.

He who can turn a traitor to his cause,
And sell his country, is the worst of liars !

CALOUS.

I do not sell my country, she sells me !

ABDALLAH.

How sells thee ?

CALOUS.

Listen to me, sage Abdallah !

Thou hast a reputation which transcends
The narrow confines of the Arab's path,
And Christian princes, though they will not learn,
Have listened to thy more than Christian wisdom.
Abdallah ! I address thee as a man,
With all his human frailties thick upon him ; —
Hear then my story — weigh it and believe.

ABDALLAH.

Proceed ! I'll throw my passions in one scale,
And yours in the other — and I'll sit in the midst,
Portioning my humanity, to keep
The balance, lest thy own preponderate.

CALOUS.

But yesterday, — alas ! the wond'rous change,

That one short revolution of this globe
May bring to man ! — but yesterday I was the pride —
The pillar of Damascus. Thou, Abdallah !
Know'st how I fought her battles.

ABDALLAH.

Would to Allah,
Thou hadst been half as zealous in *his* cause !

CALOUS.

Dissension in our ranks, and foul disunion,
Have turned my little merit to a fault,
And magnified the transformation so,
It frights them to behold it. Need I tell thee !
They would have sued for peace, and I opposed it.
And being unsuccessful yesterday,
The faction which had yielded up the city,
Have cried me down, and heaped on me their scorn ;
While Euphron, who was bound to take my part,
Has turned me from my office, and disgraced me.

ABDALLAH.

Oh, faction ! what a fiend on earth art thou !
The madness of a party or a sect,
Is but a whip placed in the hands of men,
To scourge our vices with. Oh, Calous !
Thou art our bitterest enemy ; and yet,
There is an echo from my inmost heart,
Responsive to thine own ; — but can I think

Thy noble nature would have stooped so low,
To play the traitor, and disgrace thy blood,
As thou wilt here pretend ? 'Thou do'st deceive me.

CALOUS.

Alas ! my passions weighing against thine,
Bear down that same humanity thou speak'st of ;
Have I asked any favour at thy hand,
That thou should'st so discredit my intentions ?
My life is in thy power, I pray thee take it ;
For I do loathe existence, which can bring
Nothing but foul dishonour every way.

ABDALLAH.

Would that I could believe thee — but I cannot.

CALOUS.

I tell thee, sir, I have renounced my country —
Its rank idolatry — ingratitude —
And all that I have cherished, or have loved.

ABDALLAH.

Impossible !

CALOUS.

And given myself to Islam !

ABDALLAH.

To Islam ?

CALOUS.

To the Prophet.

ABDALLAH.

Gracious Allah !

Can this be true ?

CALOUS.

God is the only God,
Mohammed is his Prophet !

ABDALLAH, (*throwing himself into his arms.*)

Caloüs !

Forgive me ! I have wronged thee ! how should I
Have known the gracious will of the Most High ?
'Twas He who turned thy heart from Syria ;
'Twas He who reconciled thy heart to Him,
In this mysterious way ! — Kneel, then, good brother !
And thank with me the Father of all light.

[*They kneel together.*]

CALOUS, (*aside.*)

Oh, what a wretch am I !

ABDALLAH, (*rising.*)

Now, then, my brother,
Thou hast disarmed suspicion — let me know
Freely thy purpose, and I will endeavour
To lend a patient hearing to thy words.

CALOUS.

Know then, I come to ask no favour of thee,
Unless it be a favour to allow
Cöoperation in thy great design
Of conquering Damascus !

ABDALLAH.

Say'st thou so !

CALOUS.

Guard me, and hold above my recreant head,
Thy sharpest scimitar. I'll show the way,
At midnight, where a secret passage leads
Right to the city's heart : when this is done,
Strike through my neck, and seal the truth I utter.

ABDALLAH.

And ask'st thou no reward for this great service ?

CALOUS.

Only the privilege to die revenged.

ABDALLAH.

Thou would'st not bathe thy hands in kindred blood ?

CALOUS.

No !

ABDALLAH.

Wouldst thou strike the ruler who disgraced thee ?

CALOUS.

I said I would not ask to be rewarded—
Yet I would have thy promise not to shed
One drop of Christian blood:—

ABDALLAH.

Thy wish is granted.

CALOUS.

An oath!

ABDALLAH.

I swear to thee by Mecca's tomb,
To keep my word inviolate.

CALOUS.

Enough!

At midnight I will teach thee to elude
The watchful sentinel—and ere the dawn
Leads on Aurora, there shall be a cry,
Such as Damascus has not heard before,
In her distresses.

ABDALLAH.

Caloüs, I believe

Sincerity has stamp'd thy every word;
But I am ruling now in Kaled's stead:—

CALOUS.

Ruling in Kaled's stead?

ABDALLAH.

Aye, in his place.

Why, know they not, in thy unhappy city,
That Kaled has withdrawn one half his forces,
To meet the imperial arms, and give them battle ?

CALOUS.

No ! on my life.

(Aside.) Oh, would they *had* but known it !

ABDALLAH.

What do'st thou think of *that*, ransomed of Allah ?

CALOUS.

I cannot wish the imperial army ill —
So it bring no relief unto Damascus !

ABDALLAH.

Oh, have no fear of that ; *I* have no fear.
Before to-morrow's dawn, Kaled will bring
The trophies of his victory.

CALOUS, *(aside.)*

Now, God forbid !

ABDALLAH.

Caloüs ! it grieves me to declare it to thee !
I cannot strike those fetters from thy arms,
Till thou hast made thy promises secure !

CALOUS.

Chains cannot fetter the free mind. Ah me !

[*Aside.*

Would that they could ! when conscience tortures it !

ABDALLAH.

Now then for action ! Soldiers, to your posts !

This night we have Damascus ! [*Exeunt.*

CALOUS, (*loitering.*)

Precious villain !

SCENE II.

An apartment in Euphron's house. Euphron alone.

EUPHRON.

'Tis done ! Another day will drop the scroll,
Where, in the record of revolving years
And great events, Damascus' fate is written.
Angel of Hope ! thou who, — when dark Despair
Hangs heavily, with sable pinions spread,
To shut out Heaven from the desponding soul, —
Piercest the sombre veil, and bring'st us peace,
Come from thy seraph-home, and gild this hour
So wrapt in clouds of dim uncertainty ! —

[*Pauses.*

Caloüs ere this has gained the ear of Kaled,
And acted like a player, his hard part.
Now, were Abdallah chief instead of him,
The Arab's pity might be taught to flow
Like some poor heart-sick maiden's, at a tale
Less true than the great fiction now on foot.
Oh, would Athenia's grief were no more real !

Enter Athenia.

My daughter !

[*Embracing her.*

ATHENIA.

Dearest father !

(*Bursting into tears : — then with emotion.*)

Caloüs !

To think that *he*, of all men, should prove false !
Oh wretch, to give away my heart to love !
Oh fool, to traffic my immortal soul,
For such a recreant's worship ! oh, my father,
The hope I should have anchored on my God,
I threw away on him ! Oh, help me, father !
I have no other father beside thee !
Save thy poor daughter ! — oh, my brain is hot,
And my heart swells to bursting ; — I have prayed

[*Solemnly.*

Most fervently for death — but without faith ;
I have waked up at last to the dark truth,
That all my heart's devotion has been false :

'Twas my imagination that I served,
And not my Maker ! Heaven have mercy on me !

EUPHRON.

Amen. May Heaven have mercy on us all !

ATHENIA.

Why, what a sinful, selfish thing am I !
My own particular grief absorbs the world's ! —
Here is Damascus reeling to her fall,
While I, *myself*, am wailing. Patience, Heaven !

EUPHRON.

Hold to that fond idea, my sweet child,
And pray to Heaven for patience. Oh, just God !
Look down upon my child, and pity her !

ATHENIA.

No ; do not ask Him to look down on *me* !
I'll hide me from Him, like the first weak creature
Who cursed herself for love ! Oh, conscience-smitten,
Vain, foolish woman, how art thou a prey
To thy wild fantasy !

EUPHRON.

My dear Athenia !

Yield not to this too stern necessity ;
Time, which has brought thee grief, will bring thee comfort.
Think how *Damascus* suffers !

ATHENIA.

Oh, I do !

Poor, widowed, lone Damascus. Yes, my father,
I'll steel my bosom for this double strife —
Bury my hopes and perish with my country !

EUPHRON.

Thou shalt not perish — neither shall Damascus.
Come, cheer thy heart, sweet mourner, there is hope
I have not told thee of. To-morrow's sun
Shall find the imperial army at our gates.

ATHENIA.

That were a joy too mighty ! Do'st thou think so ?

EUPHRON.

I know so, my dear daughter.

ATHENIA.

But, my father,
I dreamed an angel touched my lips with fire,
And bade me prophesy !

EUPHRON.

It was thy fancy.

ATHENIA, (*solemnly.*)

Father, his wings were like a summer cloud
Touched with the sunset ; and they veiled his face,
Which streamed such dazzling brightness, I fell down,

Stunned with unearthly splendour. While I lay,
Like Saul, God-smitten, paralysed with dread,
A voice that mocked all melody that floats
From choral song and instrumental breath,
Bade me arise. And as I rose, a hand
Immortal touched my quivering lips with fire.
And then a voice like many thunders rent
The dome of Heaven's high temple, crying loudly :
"Go, prophesy the downfall of Damascus !
"Her sins are scarlet, and they cry aloud
"In blasphemy ! — her day of doom is come.
"Wo to Damascus ! wo to the head of Syria !"

(*Raving.*)

Merciful Heaven, suspend this retribution !
Hold, thou death-angel ! take *another* bolt,
That will bring *madness* ! Let me not go mad !
I would not die in madness !

EUPHRON.

Oh, my daughter !

ATHENIA.

My mind ! my mind ! Oh, the dull agony
Of this alternate glimmering and shadow,
That will not let me fix my unhinged thought !
Lie still thou fluttering traitress ! 'Tis *thy* fault ;
Thou'st gorged thyself with honeyed hopes so long,
Thou do'st rebel against these bitter drugs

Of wholesome sorrow and untasted anguish :
Despair is med'cine for thee — drink or die !

EUPHRON.

Oh, if thou lov'st thy father, talk not thus !

ATHENIA, (*with forced calmness.*)

Is it not strange that reason should see madness
Tugging to reach her throne — and still more strange,
For consciousness to see the two at war,
Throttling for mastery in their great death-struggle ?

(*Smiling unnaturally.*)

Thou seest I yet can *think*, my dear, dear father !
Such is the power of my most strenuous *will*.
Now I will go and say my evening prayers,
And then to bed. Good night ! good night, dear father !

(*As she goes out.*)

Wo to Damascus ! wo !

[*Exit.*

EUPHRON.

Good night ! good night ! may blessed messengers
Hold thee in peaceful slumbers — and the morn
That finds Damascus free, awake thy smile
To greet her unexpected happiness ! —

Enter Lucretius.

How now, Lucretius, welcome.

LUCRETIVS.

Euphron !

Thou'st done a mighty wrong to Syria,
And now thou givest welcome to a man,
Who comes to rate thy folly.

EUPHRON.

How is this ?

LUCRETIVS.

Hast thou not sold thy country for a bribe ?

EUPHRON.

Never !

LUCRETIVS.

Betrayed it !

EUPHRON.

On my soul I have not !

LUCRETIVS.

Where is our General, — Caloüs ?

EUPHRON.

Revolted !

LUCRETIVS.

And why has he revolted ? — tell me that.

EUPHRON.

Go ask the people !

LUCRETIVS.

Ask the people — Traitor !

EUPHRON.

'Tis well for thee, that midst the public wo,
The railer has the privilege to fret,
Or I would have thee whipt for insolence !

LUCRETIVS.

Poor fool ! thou art beside thyself — thou know'st
'Twere more than thy bad life is worth to do it.
Where is that wretched victim of injustice,
Whom I must call thy daughter ?

EUPHRON.

I prithee do not cut my heart in twain —
It is already sundered so, its parts
Divide with life and death. 'Thou canst not judge
A father's feelings, who hast had no child !
Lucretius, thou hast done me cruel wrong !
Yet I forgive thee, for thou art a man
Incapable of meditating evil.
I do entreat thee wait awhile with patience.
Time will unravel all this mystery ;
And thou wilt turn thy curses into blessings ;
The people, too, will bless me !

LUCRETIVS.

They are mad :
Too late they find the folly of their course,
In being led so blindly ; and they rave

In bitterness of heart, against the Senate.
Manlius, whom you so wickedly have raised,
Already have they sacrificed.

EUPHRON.

Indeed !

LUCRETIVS.

Indeed ! in *very* deed : art thou the Prefect,
And still art ignorant of what is doing ?
Go to the market-place, and see the ruin
Which twenty thousand furious men have wrought
Within an hour — the Arab need not come ;
Despair and rage are enemies enough
To crush a hundred cities like Damascus.
Tell me, where is Athenia ?

EUPHRON.

Just now retired !

Heart-sick, and laden with excessive sorrow !
She would not be disturbed.

LUCRETIVS.

I did intend

To proffer comfort to her — yet, alas !
What solace could I offer ?

EUPHRON.

None whatever.

If she be spared another day, there's hope —

LUCRETIVS.

What hope?

EUPHRON.

The imperial army —

LUCRETIVS.

What of it?

EUPHRON.

It will be here to-morrow.

LUCRETIVS.

Mockery!

EUPHRON.

As surely as the sun will rise to-morrow,
Werdan will bring relief.

LUCRETIVS.

How know'st thou this?

EUPHRON.

I had a message from him yesterday.

LUCRETIVS.

I fear it will be too late.

EUPHRON.

Pray Heaven it be not!

LUCRETIVS.

Alas, the indignation of the people .
Will leave but little to be saved to-morrow.

EUPHRON.

Go, hie thee to them, good Lucretius !
Tell them the tidings, and perchance it may
Turn the dark current backward.

LUCRETIVS.

'Twere in vain !
'Thou might'st as well roll back the troublous tide
Of swoll'n Euphrates. Why didst thou keep secret
The news that might have staid its course at once ?

EUPHRON.

Reasons of state did prompt me.

LUCRETIVS.

I will do
Thy bidding ; but I fear it is too late.
Come, go with me — perchance thy countenance
May more avail than mine. Let us away.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE III.

A public square in Damascus. Shouts and disturbance around.

Enter Euphron and Lucretius.

LUCRETIVS.

What do'st thou think of't now ?

EUPHRON.

'Tis terrible.

LUCRETIVS.

They've razed St. Michael's temple to the ground
With sacrilegious violence. Look you there !
How the dark torrent swells and heaves along,
Like to the thundering avalanche, that swings
Its ponderous mass from Lebanon, uptearing
Gigantic rocks, and forests of huge cedars,
Crowding them into ruin. Look you there !
How like the very spirit of the blast,
Yon towering form of female majesty
Bears herself onward. See, they follow her !
She sways their thousands as a single one,
And that an infant ! Look ! they come this way !
Marked ye that ! marked ye that ! St. Paul, it is Athenia !

EUPHRON.

Now all the saints support me, if't be she ?

LUCRETIVS.

See ! she comes this way, the people following.

Let us stand by, and mark what she is doing.

She looks the priestess of the oracle.

Enter Athenia followed by a crowd of people.

ATHENIA.

Wo to Damascus ! wo to the head of Syria !

EUPHRON, (*rushing forward.*)

Athenia ! oh, my daughter !

Why are you here exposed to this rude fury ?

CITIZENS.

Down with the traitor Euphron, he has deceived the people — kill him ! kill him !

ATHENIA.

Kill him ! he is my father ! back, murderers, back !

CITIZENS.

He is Athenia's father — do not hurt him !

Athenia feeds the poor — let go her father,

But let us kill Lucretius !

ATHENIA.

In God's great name, I do command forbearance !

There's blood enough upon your hands already.

Repent, repent ! the doom of wrath awaits ye !

Wo to Damascus ! wo to the head of Syria !

CITIZENS.

Wo to the tyrants who deceive the people !

LUCRETIVS.

Stay this discordant tumult for a season !

CITIZENS.

Wo to the tyrants who deceive the people !

ATHENIA.

Wo to Damascus ! wo to the head of Syria !

EUPHRON.

Good people, hear me ! 'tis your good I seek !

CITIZENS.

No ! no ! no ! no ! Let us hear Lucretius.

LUCRETIVS.

Then listen to me, most abused, good people.

CITIZENS.

Let us hear Lucretius ! — speak to us, Lucretius !

LUCRETIVS.

Why do ye riot in your frenzy thus ?

Already have ye slain your General ;

Already have ye razed our sacred altars ;

And spread such desolation, that our foes

Would stand aghast, should they possess the city,

To find their own work done. Is it despair
That drives you to this fury? Hear me, then;
The imperial army will be here to-morrow.

CITIZENS.

Huzza! huzza! huzza!

LUCRETIVS.

Yes, fellow-citizens, another day
Will see Damascus free. Werdan has sent
A messenger to tell you to have hope.

CITIZENS.

Huzza! huzza! huzza! Lead us to battle!

LUCRETIVS.

Alas! there is no General to lead you.
But in the name of all ye love and worship,
I pray ye to disperse, or ruin waits you!

ATHENIA.

Wo to Damascus! wo to the head of Syria!

LUCRETIVS.

Peace, frantic maiden! Fellow-citizens,
I pray you now disperse.— If by to-morrow,
The imperial army do not succour you,
Wreak on Lucretius' head your ample vengeance.
Will ye disperse, I say?

CITIZENS.

We will ! we will ! come let us all away !

LUCRETIVS.

Thanks for this spirit ! let us be united,
And Syria yet is free !

[*The people disperse and exeunt.*

(*In the meanwhile Athenia stands abstractedly, her hands crossed
upon her bosom, with her eyes fixed upward.*

EUPHRON.

Athenia !

ATHENIA.

Who is it calls the wretch whose name I bear ?

EUPHRON.

Thy father, my loved child, thy father.

ATHENIA.

Well !

EUPHRON.

If thou hast any love for Caloüs,
Or reverence for me, I do entreat thee —

ATHENIA, (*as if waking.*)

Oh misery ! another day of misery !
Why have I waked to count the tedious moments
Of one more day of horror !

[*Looking surprised at Euphron.*

Oh memory! — my father! oh my father!

[*Bursting into tears, and throwing herself on his neck.*

EUPHRON.

Blest image of thy sainted mother, come
Repose with me thy sorrows. There is hope,
And peace, and joy, in store for thee, my child.
Come, thou poor stricken fawn — come to my heart —
A father's love shall cherish thee, my child —
A father's love shall wipe away thy tears,
And still thy troubled spirit — thank thee, heaven!

ATHENIA.

Oh father, there is comfort in these tears!
Why are we here, my father? Good Lucretius!
Let us go home — the evening air is cold —
I have been dreaming sadly, — see! 'tis late, —
The pale moon shining o'er the orchard trees,
Lists to the cricket's hymn. Let us go home —
I'm very dull in spirits, my dear father!
But I will tell thee as we walk along,
Strange things, revealed to me, in heavy slumber,
More unimaginable and sublime,
Than the Apocalypse — if it be not sin
To say so. — Come my father — good Lucretius!

[*Exeunt.*

END OF ACT IV.

ACT V.

SCENE I.

Outside the walls of Damascus. — The bell tolls twelve.

Enter Caloüs, in chains.

CALOUS, (*speaking to Abdallah at the side.*)

Wait thee awhile ; the gate is here, hard by —

I must see all things ready.

[*Approaching the secret gate.*

The Prefect must be here, — it was agreed,

At twelve o'clock precisely. Hush ! Who's there ?

[*A bolt draws slowly, and a door opens in the wall which entirely concealed it.*

Enter through the door, Euphron, muffled.

EUPHRON, (*discovering Caloüs.*)

Caloüs ! —

Now this is well ; — where are your new-born friends ?

CALOUS.

Hush ! they are here, close by.

EUPHRON.

Then it is finished ! —

Oh, noble youth ! thou hast indeed deserved
Thy country's admiration, and Athenia.
Caloüs, thy conduct has amazed the people,
As well it might, — and heaped such curses on us,
(For I am a partaker of their hatred,)
As never men received. I almost fear
Our project has o'erleaped itself and failed ;
For riot has been ruling in our city,
O'erswaying public order. Yesterday,
The mob demolished all our granaries,
To satisfy their fury, and tore down
St. Michael's tower, We've had a fearful time !

CALOUS.

Oh melancholy presage ! Poor Damascus ! —
How is Athenia ?

EUPHRON.

Speak not of her now.
Away with all despondency, — and turn
Thy sad presages into rainbow hopes.
I will away, and tell Athenia all,
'Tis time the imperial army were in hearing.

CALOUS.

Do'st know that Kaled with one half his army
Has gone to give them battle ?

EUPHRON.

You surprise me !

CALOUS.

'Tis true ; — and on the event, all things depend.

Werdan has twice the force that Kaled has.

Retire within the city — there is hope.

Draw up our forces in a solid phalanx

Within St. Michael's square : — should ill betide,

I'll cut my way to meet them. Fare thee well !

EUPHRON.

Farewell ! I'll have all ready — now God speed thee !

[Enters the gate.]

CALOUS.

Now then, Abdallah, follow !

Enter Abdallah with soldiers.

ABDALLAH.

Thou art faithful !

Strike off his chains ; — henceforth we will be friends !

CALOUS.

This way !

[They enter the gate, and the scene closes.]

SCENE II.

A street within the city. — Enter Abdallah and Caloüs with soldiers.

ABDALLAH.

Now is Damascus ours : — I thank thee, Allah !
That thou hast granted me a bloodless triumph.
Without thy aid through him, this goodly place
Had swam with Christian blood ; — far better thus.

Enter a Saracen soldier in haste.

Why this haste ?

SOLDIER.

Peace to the Prophet's friend !
Kaled returns victorious !

ABDALLAH.

Thanks again !
Here is a double glory for our arms.

SOLDIER.

The army of Heraclius is routed,
Their General slain.

CALOUS, (*aside.*)

Then are we lost indeed !

[*Shouts and screams heard without.*]

Now God direct my efforts !

[*Springing at Abdallah suddenly, Caloüs
wrests his scimitar from his hand.*

Damascus ! I am with thee once again,
To save thee, or to perish !

ABDALLAH.

Strike down the traitor ! — Treason !

[*The Saracens spring forward, but Caloüs
cuts his way through them, and exit.*

Follow him to the death !

[*Several chase after him.*

Now curse this credulous heart for trusting him !

Enter Kaled.

Welcome, thou sword of God ! by Allah, welcome !
Kaled ! we've gained Damascus but to lose it,
Unless thy valiant arm restore the day !

KALED.

How now, Abdallah ! why this great turmoil ?
I come to bring thee news of victory ;
Ay, victory, Abdallah ! conquest too !
The imperial army we have hewn in pieces ;
A hundred thousand Christians are destroyed,
Save the poor remnant that escaped to carry
Their miserable remnant to Corinth.
(*Sarcastically.*) And thou hast won the city in my absence !

ABDALLAH.

Caloüs betrayed it to us.

KALED.

Fool ! 'twas *thou*
That wast betrayed ; — nay, I have heard it all.
So much for thy great generalship, Abdallah !
Know then, I've stormed the western gate, even now
While thou wast fooling with that Christian dog.
Dera is making havoc like a wolf
That's broke into a fold. Onward, and join him !
I'll hunt this Caloüs, wer't but for his head
To wear upon my spear, when I return
Triumphant to the Caliph.

ABDALLAH.

I have done wrong —
But Abubekir may forgive the offence.

KALED.

This is no time for grief ; — truce to complaining.
Abdallah ! I forgive thee in the joy
That vanquishes my bosom. Thou hast gained
Merit for good intention. On to battle !
Paradise ! Paradise !

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE III.

A street in Damascus : — Greek soldiers flying. Caloüs rallying them.

CALOUS.

Stand ! as ye value life ! for God's sake stand !
What ! shall the glitter of a thousand moons
Strike madness on your reason ? Hear me, soldiers !
Death gapes for your whole city — there he stands
With appetite insatiate as your fears ;
A moment, and 'tis lost — a chance remains ;
Look how they hem us in ! by Christ's own blood,
Let not my heart burst with this base confusion !
We must break through a legion of steel men
To ransom the lost city — save your daughters !
Look at me, soldiers ! I am yet your General !
True as this steel, dark with the foeman's gore ; —
Or shall I go alone ? — Ignoble slaves !

SOLDIERS.

Lead us on ! lead us on ! Caloüs and victory !

CALOUS.

Oh, now ye feel the blood of all your sires
Tingling, as true blood should ! — Grasp your bright blades
Once more — brace every sinew, soldiers ! but once more !
And strike for liberty !

[*Exit.*

[*Soldiers follow shouting.*

SCENE IV.

St. Michael's square. — Enter Kaled.

KALED.

Now, by the tomb of Mecca, these foul dogs
Are fang'd like desert lions. — My good blade
Has drunk more life than a Sirocco blast,
Yet still it thirsteth. Let me breathe awhile.

Enter Caloüs.

Ha! Infidel! — I have thee then, at last!
Bow to the Prophet! or I'll cleave thy scull,
Which better had been turbaned. Yield thee, slave!

CALOUS.

Bow to the Cross, proud Moslem! thou shalt find,
In this dark moment of necessity,
How faint a light imposture yields its vassals!

KALED.

Have at thee, Christian dog!

*[They fight, and exeunt fighting. Caloüs driving
Kaled, — while an alarm is heard, with the cry
of "the standard, Kaled! the standard! rescue!
rescue!"*

Enter Euphron and Lucretius.

EUPHRON.

This is the place! our friends are gathering fast;
The square is thronged with most determined men:
I never knew their spirit till this hour.

[*Sounds of battle.*

See there, Lucretius! how the battle rages!
Look how those two in front flash at each other!
That Saracen is Kaled, by my life!
Look there! he's down! he's down! victory! victory! —
Gods! what a blow was that the hero gave him!
By Mars! it is the noble Caloüs!
Caloüs returned! *he never has revolted!*
Thou art no traitor! Onward, Caloüs!
Damascus yet is free! join him, Lucretius!
Keep thy sword hot, my friend! [Exit Lucretius.

Enter a Messenger.

How now, what news?

MESSENGER.

Our friends are everywhere victorious;
Kaled is dead, — and by the eastern gate,
Where Dera bears the hottest of the fight,
Our arms are doing prodigies of valour!

EUPHRON.

This is, indeed, most glorious — tell me, now,

If thou canst tell, aught that concerns my daughter ; —
I've searched even pented avenues to find her,
And all in vain.

MESSENGER.

I heard a soldier say,
Who brought despatches from the western tower,
That she was in the thickest of the fight,
Like to an Amazonian maid, and leading
The common people bravely in the war,
And with an energy that ne'er before
Was heard of among women.

EUPHRON.

Oh, Athenia !
This last blow was too much. Could I undo
The tangle in this thread of misery,
And make it straight again, I'd give up life,
With its immortal hopes, to save my daughter.
Oh, I must save my lost Athenia,
Or perish in the effort !

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE V.

By the Western Tower.

[Flourish of Trumpets.

*Enter Dera and Caloüs fighting. They make several turns,
and Caloüs drives him out.*

Enter Athenia, armed with a short sword.

ATHENIA.

Oh, my lost country — wretched, fallen Damascus !
How art thou set a mark for every shaft
That wings misfortune's quiver ! Now, could I
Find out that monster, Kaled, this right arm,
Nerved by thy power, Holy Omnipotence !
Would search the tyrant's heart, with this good blade,
And liberate my country. Caloüs ! Caloüs !
Oh, what a chance was lost of being great,
When thou didst play the traitor to our hopes,
And sell thy wretched country !

Enter Caloüs almost breathless.

CALOUS.

Oh, Athenia !

Armed !

ATHENIA.

Robber ! thou'st stolen th' habiliments of war

To sanctify thy murders ! hence, and leave me !

CALOUS.

Hast thou not seen thy father, my Athenia !
Has he not told thee of the sacrifice ?
I am thy friend, Athenia ! thy own
True-hearted Caloüs !

ATHENIA.

Thou, my Caloüs !

'Tis false, perfidious varlet ! he so named,
Was noble, generous ; selfishness, in vain
Searched his great heart to find companionship.
But thou ! — there's not a reptile which the sun
Engenders on the slimy banks of Nile,
That is not nobler than thy hateful self ;
Hence, recreant, hence ! I loathe thee !

CALOUS.

What dire distemper so misshapes the truth ?
Look on me, dear Athenia, 'tis the same
True heart that loved thee well, and still loves.
Merciful Heaven !

ATHENIA.

Call not on Heaven, thou traitor !

Hast thou not sacrificed thy plighted faith ?
Hast thou not played a coward's part ? — nay, start not ;
Hast thou not sold thy country, for the sake
Of wreaking thy poor vengeance ?

CALOUS.

No, by Heaven !

ATHENIA.

Infamous liar ! away, I will not hear thee.

CALOUS.

Oh, my own love ! most truly I forgive
This transport that thine ignorance has kindled !
Time will explain, Athenia ! — thy father
Will tell thee, my Athenia, I am true.
Nay, turn not thus away thine angel face,
Thou shalt not leave me thus ; — nay, frown not on me !
For I do claim thee my affianced bride,
And hold thee to my panting bosom, thus !

[Embracing her.]

ATHENIA.

Die, then, perfidious traitor ! for a bride
Take to thy bosom this true steel, — it loves thee !

[Stabs him — Caloüs falls.]

Now, hush thy thunder !

CALOUS.

Athenia, I forgive thee — it is just —
I loved thee — worshipped thee — thou didst predict —
Farewell ! —

*[Dies.]**Enter Euphron.*

EUPHRON.

My daughter ! joy to thee ! joy to Damascus !

Kaled is dead !

ATHENIA.

Now, then, just Heaven, I thank thee !

EUPHRON, (*discovering the body.*)

How, Caloüs slain ! — oh, terrible decree !

Who has done this ?

ATHENIA.

Thy daughter !

EUPHRON.

Thou, Athenia !

ATHENIA.

Was't not done nobly ? Brutus, in old Rome,
Saw with prophetic eye this glorious deed,
And emulating my self-sacrifice,
Slew his own son for justice !

EUPHRON.

Oh, most cruel,
Mad, and misguided girl, how couldst thou do it !

ATHENIA.

Would'st thou have had the daughter of thy blood
Contaminated by the foul embrace
Of a vile traitor ? I had shunned him, father ;
But he pursued me, and though spurned, abhorred,
He caught me as the serpent the high priest,

Laocoön; and in his hateful fold,
Claimed me as his affianced ! 'twas too much !
Father, the spirits of a hundred sires
Hissed me to very madness, — and Damascus
Howled in my ears, Revenge ! — the voice of God
Burst over me in thunder — and I slew him !

EUPHRON.

'Twas a rash deed ! — oh, had I trusted Heaven,
Caloüs had lived to bless thee !

Enter Lucretius.

Look, Lucretius !
See how the blood of Syria stains the ground.
Caloüs is slain — Athenia is a murderess !

LUCRETIVS.

Mysterious Providence !
Euphron, I come the herald of despair !

EUPHRON.

What new calamity ?

LUCRETIVS.

Werdan is dead !
The imperial army routed — and the foe
Are masters of the city !

EUPHRON.

Then 'tis finished !
There is no other step to misery ! —

Athenia ! it was wrong to hide from thee,
The clue to this great labyrinth of woes ;
But we have trusted in our own weak power,
And Heaven that saw our great impurity,
Has left our weak designs to work us ill !
'Twas I who urged on Caloüs to the deed,
That Heaven has stampt with dire disapprobation !

ATHENIA.

Oh, misery ! —

EUPHRON.

Patience ! for the tale, though sad,
Is quickly told.

ATHENIA.

Ah, wo is me !

EUPHRON.

Famine !

As well ye know, had joined the foe to crush us.
Exhausted, spiritless, and destitute,
Our people grew licentious in their rage,
And hatched rebellion. In this trying hour,
Kaled, who knew our weakness, had resolved
On one great effort — one decisive blow —
And yesterday, Damascus was to have fallen.
In vain had we despatched our messengers
To Corinth ; till at last, but yesterday,

An arrow thrown o'er the wall, brought us intelligence
From Werdan, that his army would be here
This hour ! — Thou do'st turn pale, Athenia !

A T H E N I A .

Go on !

E U P H R O N .

The message intimated stratagem.
There was presented the alternative
Of falling, or of practising deceit ;
Expediency pointed out the last.
An instrument was wanting, and I chose —

A T H E N I A .

Oh no, thou couldst not do it — say not, father,
Say not 'twas Caloüs !

L U C R E T I U S .

Oh, wond'rous strange !

E U P H R O N .

At first his generous nature did oppose
The action as unworthy — but I urged,
(Pardon me, dearest daughter, for the truth,) •
Thy unprotected innocence, — his love —
And he at last consented.

(A T H E N I A , (*Turning to the body.*)

Murdered innocence !

EUPHRON.

Damascus was betrayed but seemingly —
Th' imperial army at this very hour,
Was to have turned the sighs of this sad city
To shouts of triumph — and the rich reward
For such a noble deed, — thy hand, Athenia !

ATHENIA.

Where are thy lightnings — Heaven ?

EUPHRON, (*turning to the body.*)

Oh, noble nature !

How hast thou been requited for thy love !

ATHENIA.

Father ! thou'st done a deed to damn thee ever !
It was not *I* — 'twas *thou* that slew my Caloüs !
Where sleeps the thunder ? vengeance thou art dead.
Strike at the murderer ! there ! have at him ! there !
Not *him* — not *him* ! it was not he that did it !
Rather strike here ! — oh, my own murdered husband !

[*Throws herself on his body.*]

*A flourish of trumpets. — Abdallah and Dera enter on both
sides with soldiers, and fill the stage.*

DERA.

Here is the Prefect — yield thy neck, base Christian !

ABDALLAH, (*rushing forward.*)

Stand back ! by great Mohammed, stay thine arm !

I am thy General now — I do command thee ! —
Damascus is our own — no more of blood !

Lucretius and Euphron support Athenia, who partly rises.

ATHENIA.

The day of doom is come ! oh, horror ! horror !
How the sea waves with blood, and the red torrent
Surges and heaves with life and death commingling !
The graves give up their dead — and shrouded skeletons
Scream midst the desolation ! hush — sh — hush — sh —
Hark ! how the damned are wailing — I'll not hear them !

EUPHRON, (*endeavouring to raise her.*)

Athenia !

ATHENIA.

Let us alone ! let us alone ! death shall not part us thus.
They have deceived us, Caloüs ! thou art mine !
Death shall not part the faithful !

EUPHRON.

Oh, my daughter !

ATHENIA, (*rising.*)

Look ! how the heavens open ! oh, how deep !
How bright ! how bright ! the angels, oh, the angels !
Hark, how they sing ! oh, rapturous harmony !
See how they bear him up upon their wings,
And circle him with glory ! — stay ! oh, stay !

Blest seraphim ! — Athenia would go with you !

*[Her head droops, and she falls. Raising herself,
with a smile, looking upward.]*

Father ! receive my spirit !

[Dies.]

*[They bend mournfully around her, while the
curtain falls.]*

THE END.

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